

but keeping a preparation of strong scent 'in case I met with anything of offensive smells or a dead body'. Hodges gives a detailed account of his personal prophylactic measures:

'As soon as I rose in the Morning early, I took the Quantity of a Nutmeg of *Anti-pestilential Electuary* . . . on entering the houses of the sick, 'I immediately had burnt some proper Thing upon Coals and also kept in my Mouth some Lozenges. Before Dinner, I always drank a Glass of *Sack*, to warm the stomach' (Hodges, p 223).

Dr Hodges was a great believer in the efficacy of sack and it is sad to record that he died in Ludgate debtors' prison in June 1688, possibly a victim of the potation which he had learned to imbibe so copiously as a prophylactic.

Tobacco was held in great esteem, though Defoe thought little of it and Boghurst had a personal vendetta against it which has a modern sound: 'I never took a pipe this year, nor ever will. How many thousands of tobacco smokers, think you, died this year?' (p 55).

Medicaments and quack remedies were recommended on all sides. Defoe's Dr Heath said that if all the prescriptions of all the physicians in London were examined, it would be found that they were all compounded of the same things, with such variations only as the particular fancy of the doctor leads him to.

Conclusion

In 1722, Daniel Defoe, wit, satirist and journalist, produced a great social document, from which brief extracts only have been given. One can convey little of the descriptions of horror with which Defoe invests his story, nor have his non-medical sources been mentioned, for instance, the poem of George Withers, 'Britain's Remembrancer' which describes the plague of 1625, or Thomas Dekker's 'Seven Deadly Sins of London' (1606), from both of which he borrowed.

Defoe's 'Journal', though written long after the event, and though of imaginative construction, nevertheless gives us a picture of these grievous events which has ever since affected men's views of those terrible times. Had London suffered again, as was feared, Defoe's writings would have ranked with those of the medical plague-authors in their use and value to the community.

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Dr Harold Avery (*London*)

Plague Churches, Monuments and Memorials¹

In England, there is a tendency to think of the Plague of London of 1665 as being an isolated event and the final visitation of that Pest to this country. However, the outbreak which we, in London, commemorate this year was part of an endemic disease which had ravaged Europe, including England, since the Black Death in the fourteenth century and which continued to take its toll on the Continent for nearly a century after it had finally left this island.

This paper will deal with some of the memorials of plague which I have seen in Europe.

As the true ætiology of the disease was not known many were the causes to which it was attributed. Thousands of Jews, heretics and witches, accused of spreading the disease by poisoning wells, infecting the air or smearing 'plague ointment', were burned and murdered. But by some the plague was considered evidence of the wrath of God, for did not the Psalmist say.

'God judgeth the righteous and God is angry with the wicked every day. If he turn not, he will whet his sword; he hath bent his bow, and made it ready.'

Plague Saints

Christ, the Madonna, the Trinity and various saints were invoked by the faithful (and the hopeful) to intercede, on their behalf, with an angered God and vows were made for the building of churches and other votives if their prayers were answered. We therefore find these votives and memorials, in the form of churches, chapels, monuments, altar-pieces and paintings throughout Europe.

The saints who were specially invoked were:

¹This paper was illustrated with 45 slides

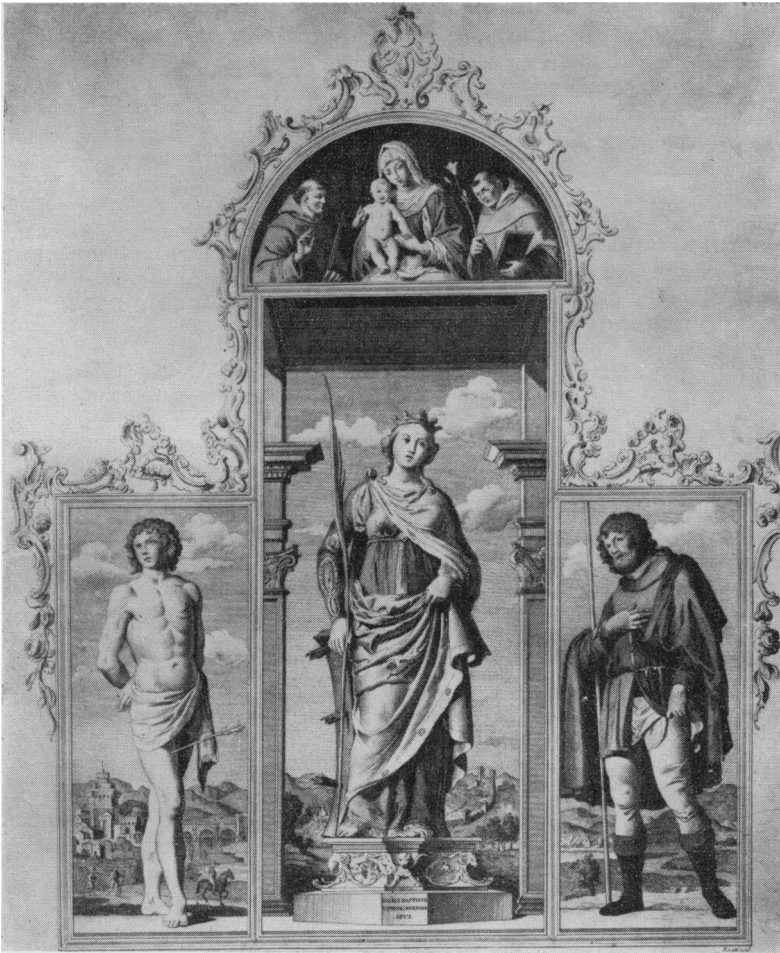


Fig 1 Engraving of the altar-piece of the Church of St Roche at Mestre, after the painting by Cima da Conegliano. The St Catherine and the lunette are now in the Wallace Collection, the St Sebastian and St Roche at Strasbourg. (Crown copyright, reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the Wallace Collection)

(1) St Sebastian, who survived martyrdom by the wounds of arrows (only to be clubbed to death later). Here we see the old idea of pestilence being the result of the showering of the arrows of God upon an erring people, as the wrathful Apollo, with his arrows, sent a plague upon the Greeks before Troy.

(2) St Roche (Italian, San Rocco), who was miraculously cured of a plague bubo acquired whilst attending to plague patients at Piacenza.

(3) St Charles Borromeo, who remained in Milan in 1576 to organize relief and nurse the plague sufferers when all who could had left the town.

(4) Job of the Old Testament, was invoked as St Job by the Christian communities in the East.

(5) St Anthony had quite a vogue in South Germany.

Hardly more than a stone's throw from the Royal Society of Medicine, in Gallery X of the Wallace Collection, hangs a painting of St Catherine of Alexandria by Cima da Conegliano (1460–1508). This appears to have nothing to do with plague, but an engraving in the Albertina at Vienna shows that the picture was originally part of a polyptych, the altar-piece of the Church of S Rocco at Mestre (the Venice mainland) (Fig 1). On the left is St Sebastian and on the right, St Roche (or San Rocco), the two principal plague saints. These two wings are now to be seen in the Musée des Beaux Arts at Strasbourg. But the exact date when the altar-piece left Venice is not known.

Plague Centres

Venice suffered from the plague more than any other city; seventy epidemics have been recorded. The explanation lies in the fact that Venetian merchants controlled the trade of the ports of the Levant, the terminals of the caravan routes of Asia. From there they brought back to their home town not only merchandise but also rats, fleas and plague, which passed on through Venice to the countries of Central and Northern Europe. Next to Venice, Vienna was one of the principal distributing centres of the plague, standing at the cross-roads of the Venice-Baltic route and the East-West Danube river route.

GERMANY

Cologne

Eau de Cologne was one of the perfumed waters originally introduced to ward off the noxious vapours that were thought to cause the plague. In the Neumarkt of Cologne there stood, before the bombing of the last war, an ancient house and tower, from a window of which two horses looked out upon the crowd below. The modern building

which has been erected on the site still has the two heads (Fig 2). Few who pass by realize that this has a plague association. An early history of Cologne tells us that:

'When the plague raged at Cologne in 1357, Richmondis von Lyskirchen, wife of the knight Mengis von Adocht, was attacked by the malady and, having fallen into a death-like swoon, was interred in the Apostles' Church. Being awakened from her trance by a thievish gravedigger in his attempts to abstract her ring, she returned to the house of her husband who, imagining he beheld an apparition, declared he would sooner believe his horses could ascend to the loft of his house than that his departed spouse should return in propria persona. Scarcely had the words escaped his lips than horses' hoofs were heard mounting the stairs, and their heads were speedily seen looking out of a window in the upper story of the house. The lady recovered, and lived for many years afterwards.'

The two horses heads have been placed there to commemorate the miraculous event.



Fig 2 *The horses' heads of the Richmondshaus, Cologne*

Bingen

Further up the Rhine lies the city of Bingen at the foot of the Rochusberg (the Hill of St Roche). The Rochuscappelle on the eastern brow of the hill was built in 1677 in thanksgiving for deliverance from the plague of 1666. On the festival of St Roche (the first Sunday after August 16), after solemn prayers at this chapel, open-air dancing, music and feasting take place.

Munich

Bavaria's tutelary saint is the Virgin Mary and in the centre of Munich's principal square, the Marienplatz, stands the Mariensäule (the Column of the Virgin). This was erected in 1638 in commemoration of the victory of the Weisseberg (the White Hill) where the combined Catholic armies of the Empire and Bavaria defeated the Bohemian Protestants outside Prague. On the plinth of the column four genii fight a viper, a basilisk, a lion and a dragon, which are emblems of *plague*, war, famine and heresy.

Oberammergau

Also in Bavaria is Oberammergau where every ten years since 1634 the Passion Play is performed in fulfilment of a vow made during an epidemic of plague in 1633.

AUSTRIA

In the territories of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire we come across certain characteristic pillars honouring the Holy Trinity. These pillars were erected during the period between 1650 and

1800 and most of them are memorials put up in thanksgiving for the cessation of one of the frequent epidemics of plague, which raged in the Danube Valley.

The Brotherhood of the Holy Trinity was founded in Austria in 1652 to minister to the sick and plague-stricken and to spread and consolidate the worship of the Trinity. Through its influence during the plague that broke out in Vienna in 1679 a wooden structure was erected in the Graben consisting of a pillar surmounted by a group of the Trinity and with angels at the base. The Emperor Leopold I in 1687 replaced this wooden monument by a magnificent ornate stone structure to commemorate the end of the epidemic. It is known as the 'Pestsäule' or Plague Column (Fig 3).

This Pestsäule of Vienna is the most ornately baroque of all the many plague columns which



Fig 3 The Pestsäule of Vienna



Fig 4 Detail from Vienna Pestsäule. Above, Leopold I prays for his people. Below, Faith overthrows the pest

are to be found in Austria. Its general shape is that of a pyramid. At the base a group of figures represents the Victory of Faith over the Plague (Fig 4). Fides, a woman holding the Cross, stands over the prostrate figure of an old hag. On the next tier is the kneeling figure of the Emperor Leopold I praying to the Trinity to save his people; around him are the crests of Austria, Hungary and Bohemia. From this base rises a great pyramid of clouds with nine large and a great number of small angels. On the top are the figures of the Father and the Son and the Dove representing the Holy Ghost.

Trinity Columns as votives and thank-offerings were built throughout the Emperor's dominions and particularly in his Austrian possessions. But the complex design that we see in the Viennese Pestsäule gradually changed. The pyramidal mass of clouds first became a spiral of clouds (Linz), then a narrow garland of clouds (Zwettl) around a pillar and finally a simple column supporting the Trinity (Wiener Neustadt). Meanwhile, at the base, groups of saints appeared, and among them the plague saints, St Roche and St Sebastian, and the medical saints, Cosmos and Damian, can often be distinguished (Graz, Fig 5).



Fig 5 Graz. Trinity Column with Virgin and saints

Whilst these developments were taking place in the design of the columns, another influence was tending to replace the Trinity by the Virgin Mary. The Jesuits, the spearhead of the Counter-Reformation, gradually ousted the Brotherhood of the Trinity and strengthened the veneration of the Virgin, their own patron. This change is reflected in the designs of the plague columns. At first the Virgin is introduced, together with other saints, at the foot of the Trinity Column (Zwettl), then floating in the air half way up the column (Klosterneuburg, Graz, Leoben) and then just under the group of the Trinity (Eisenstadt). Finally, the Trinity disappears and the columns are straightforward St Mary Columns like that at Munich, with (Stein a.d. Donau) or without groups of saints around the base. A unique pillar is the one at Horn in Lower Austria, where the Virgin stands on the top of the column whilst the Trinity is grouped at its foot.

In Vienna is the Karlskirche (St Charles' Church), the most beautiful Baroque Church in the city. It owes its foundation to a vow made by the Emperor Charles VI during the plague of 1713. Charles vowed, if the plague ceased, to build a church dedicated to his own patron saint, the plague saint, St Charles Borromeo. The plague died out in 1714, after 120,000 had died, and the building was begun in 1715. In the tympanum are portrayed, in relief, the ravages of the plague and on two columns that stand in front are reliefs depicting the life of St Charles Borromeo. On the gable is the inscription: 'Vota mea reddam in conspectu timentium deum' (My vow is fulfilled in the sight of the God-fearing).

ITALY

Venice

Venice is a city that has suffered more than any other from the plague and which has, therefore, more reminders of this disease than any other city. There are five plague churches in Venice, which were built as the result of vows for the staying of the plague: S Giobbe (1462), S Rocco (1485), S Sebastiano (1506), Il Redentore (1577), and Sta Maria della Salute (1632).

Church of S Giobbe (1462-71): This church was built in the middle of the fifteenth century by the Doge Christoforo Moro. The sufferings and tribulations of Job made him a suitable person to invoke once the Eastern Churches had adopted this Old Testament saint into Christian hagiography. In Europe, his cult was practically confined to the Adriatic coast of Italy.

Over the high altar of the Church stood the famous Bellini painting of 'Madonna and Child enthroned between SS Job, John the Baptist, Sebastian, Francis and Louis of Toulouse'. This picture now hangs in the Accademia.

There are relatively few plague objects in this church, but there is much to remind us that this was a Franciscan Mission Church built close to the Jewish Ghetto. For example, in the lunette of the doorway is a relief showing rays of mercy from heaven falling upon Sinai, on the left St Francis and on the right St Job. The meaning – Plague on the one hand, and Salvation on the other, come to Jew and Christian alike.

School and Church of S Rocco (1485-1550): The Scuola di S Rocco, founded in 1415, was one of the five Scuole, or Guilds of Charitable Brethren, established to fulfil the 'Temporal Works of Mercy'. Its particular duty was to attend to the sick and plague-stricken. Though St Roche died in 1327 it was only in 1414 that his cult became widespread after his effigy had stopped an outbreak of plague during the Council of Constance. For plague-ridden Venice, possession of the body of this saint would be a godsend and so, in 1485, the Venetians succeeded in stealing the relics from Montpellier and brought them to the Church of the Brotherhood. A new building for the Scuola, begun in 1517, was finished in 1550 and extensively decorated with paintings of the life of St Roche by Tintoretto. On the oak panelling of the upper hall are twenty carvings of subjects from the life of the saint (seventeenth century).

In the Church adjoining the Guild House (Scuola) are four great pictures by Tintoretto of the Charity of St Roche.

Every year, on August 16, the Doge came to this church to implore St Roche to avert the plague from the Republic.

The Church of St Sebastian (1506-18): This church was decorated by Veronese (who lies

buried here) with many scenes from the life of St Sebastian and his companions. The domed apse is entirely devoted to the glorification of St Sebastian. There is a great deal of plague symbolism in this church which is not always easy to interpret. An altar of black and white marble with spiral columns (fourth on the right-hand wall) symbolizes mourning for plague victims. On the outer shutters of the organ is a Purification of Mary in the Temple symbolizing purification from the pestilence. On the inner shutters is the Pool of Bethesda, a common plague subject (cf. at San Rocco).

The Church of Il Redentore (1577–92): This is the most important building on the island of the Giudecca. During the Great Plague of 1575 the Doge Mocenigo and the Patriarch Trevisano, in an effort to appease the divine wrath, vowed to build a church. Their prayers were entirely successful for the pestilence came to an end and Palladio was called in to build a church dedicated to 'The Redeemer'. This church is now the object of an annual festival held on the third Sunday in July, when a pontoon bridge is thrown across the Grand Canal and a longer one stretches across the wide Giudecca Canal. Since 1577 this festival, called the Sagra or Festa del Redentore (the Feast of the Redeemer), has been immensely popular, bands play on the Giudecca, fireworks are let off at midnight and the festival ends with a historical regatta in costume on the Grand Canal. Then everyone rows out to the Lido to greet the rising sun.

The Church of Santa Maria della Salute, 1632: In 1631 the plague which had been raging for sixteen months in the islands of the Venetian lagoon ceased suddenly on November 21, the day that the Doge Contarini and Patriarch Tiepolo made a vow to erect a church in honour of the Virgin. A week later the Doge, Council, senate and clergy went in solemn procession from the high altar of St Mark's to the centre of the Piazza, where a halt was made for the official declaration that the plague was at an end through the intercession of the Virgin. They then crossed the Grand Canal by pontoon to a wooden church hastily erected on ground given by the Knights Templars. Here the city's solemn thanks were offered to 'Saint Mary of Health'. The present church, built on 1,200,000 piles, was not finished until 1687. Every year, on November 21, two bridges of boats are built across the canal and Venice renews its thanksgiving and implores the continued protection of the Madonna della Salute. Since the fall of the Republic and the last Doge, the ceremony is observed by the Patriarch and Clergy of St Mark's Cathedral.

On the high altar of the church is a marble group representing the Virgin banishing the

demons of the plague, and in the chief sacristy, over the altar, is Titian's 'Mark enthroned with Saints'. It was painted as a votive offering on the cessation of an earlier plague. St Mark, patron of Venice, sits on his throne, whilst below are the plague saints, St Sebastian and St Roche, and the two medical saints, SS Cosmos and Damian.

Venice theriac: In the Campo Santo Stefano there is a chemist shop, the Farmacia Milion. Ten yards from the shop there are circular indentations in the broad flagstones which mark where the great cauldrons were brought for concocting theriac. Theriac was believed by many physicians to be specific against plague and there was a great demand for it. Theriac of Venice or Venice treacle was considered superior to its rivals, the theriac of Bologna, Florence or Genoa and even to that of Cairo. John Evelyn, among his purchases in Venice included the treacle; I quote from his memoirs:

'Having packed up my purchases of books, pictures, casts, treacle (the making and extraordinary ceremony whereof I had been curious to observe, for it is extremely pompous and worth seeing), I departed from Venice.'

Hugh Morgan, Apothecary to the Queen, in 1585 wrote:

'It is very lamentable that strangers do dayly send into England a false and naughty kind of mithridatum and treacle in great barrells more than a thousand weight in a year and utter the same at a low price for 3 pence and 4 pence a pound to the great hurt of her Majesties' subjects and no small gain to the strangers' purses.'

Florence

Among the numerous votives and memorials of the plague to be found in Florence the most interesting is the *Or San Michele*. This was originally built as a loggia in which to hang a venerated picture, known as 'Our Lady of Consolation', by Ugolino of Siena. This picture of the Virgin proved to be miraculous and it was the intercession of 'Our Lady of Consolation' that saved Florence from the Great Plague, the Black Death, of 1348. The loggia was therefore transformed into a church and the various city guilds provided the exterior decorations. The physicians and apothecaries commissioned Luca della Robbia to model one of his glazed terracotta plaques of the Virgin, the patron of their guild. The miraculous picture of the Virgin was placed inside the church in an ornate shrine built by Orcagna.

Siena

Two of the principal plague memorials in Siena are to be seen in the main square. The beautiful chapel (*Cappella della Piazza*) which projects from

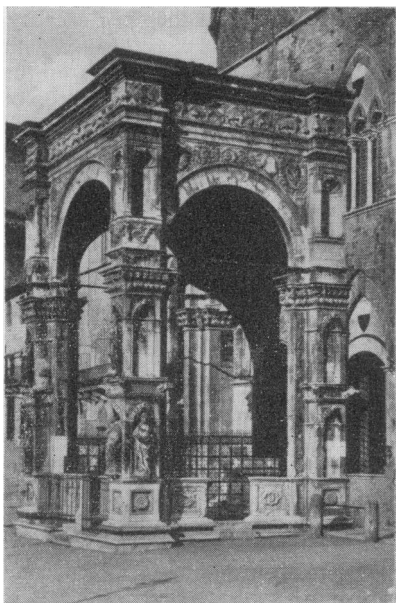


Fig 6 *Siena. Cappella della Piazza*

the facade beneath the great tower (Il Mangia) of the Palazzo Pubblico commemorates the deliverance of Siena from the plague of 1348. It was commenced in 1352 (Fig 6).

On the other side of the square is the fountain known as the *Fonta Gaia*. Over it formerly stood an antique statue of Venus. There is a tradition that at the end of the fourteenth century the Bishop declared the frequent visitations of the plague to be due to the veneration of this heathen idol. The statue was therefore taken down and buried over the frontier, in Florentine territory, Siena being at war with Florence at the time. Jacopo della Quercia was commissioned to decorate the fountain in a more Christian fashion, with a figure of the Virgin (1402–19). This fountain proved to be his masterpiece.

Rome

The well known Castello S Angelo was originally the Emperor Hadrian's mausoleum. It obtained its present name, the Castle of the Holy Angel, from a miraculous event. In AD 590 plague ravaged Rome and Pope Gregory the Great,

carrying a picture of the Virgin painted by St Luke, led a penitential procession, to St Peter's. As he crossed the Bridge of Hadrian he saw the Archangel Michael on the mausoleum sheathing a bloody sword and from that moment the plague ceased.¹ A chapel called St Michael among the Clouds was built on the summit of the building and later a statue of the Archangel was placed upon it.

During the Black Death, 1348, the panic-stricken people remembered the former miracle and again carried the picture of the Virgin to St Peter's. As it passed over the bridge the Angel was seen to bow its head in homage.

The pictures of the Virgin in the Church of Sta Maria Ara Coeli and the Church of Sta Maria Maggiore are both claimed to have been painted by St Luke, and both are claimed to be that carried by St Gregory in his procession.

The footprints of the angel can be seen in the Capitoline Museum on an altar which formerly stood in the Church of Sta Maria Ara Coeli.

There are innumerable other plague commemoratives in Italy (plague banners of Perugia and other parts of Umbria, the chapels, churches, and votives in almost every city of the peninsula); in Czechoslovakia; Jugoslavia; Poland; or even nearby France.

In Switzerland, as in Southern Germany, a spate of 'Dance of Death' paintings and engravings were inspired by the uncertainty of life during a period of plague. The forty paintings in the Muhlebrücke of Lucerne are unique in that they show death appearing among groups of people continuing in their normal occupations. Of particular interest to us are the scenes depicting the apothecary and the quack.

Acknowledgments: I wish to thank all those who, over the course of years, have helped me in my study of plague pictures and other commemoratives and in particular, Miss Anna Terry who has helped with translations, and Dr Giuseppe Mazzotti of Treviso, the authority on all that pertains to the Veneto, and Professor Dr L Glaesinger of Zagreb.

¹This procession is the subject of an early sixteenth century fresco in the Lady Chapel of Winchester Cathedral